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ABSTRACT

This practicum was designed by a curriculum development administrator to develop positive attitudes in at-risk 7th-9th grade students in a drop prevention school in Florida. The school was located in a small town in an agricultural county whose population was predominantly black and of low socioeconomic status. The number of students varied from 52 to 48. One aim was to give students an opportunity to discover the relationship of education to their future success. Another aim was to develop decision making and critical thinking skills in these students. The last aim was to expose students to numerous career opportunities. Four interdisciplinary units which centered around the importance of education, decision making skills, critical thinking skills and career awareness were developed. The project administrator obtained material; arranged initial and culminating experiences for each unit; evaluated each unit; led a teacher workshop; and supervised and maintained the project. The results of the practicum were positive. An analysis of the results indicated that students had more positive attitudes when there were hands-on opportunities. Students were allowed to work in small groups in order to have collaborative learning experiences. Teachers understood the requirements of other teachers and spaced their assignments. Following a calendar demanded preplanning, but it also gave focus for the entire time of the unit. Teachers enjoyed working together as a team and began, in addition, to plan small units of their own. The appendixes include survey and evaluation forms. (25 references) (ABL)

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Developing Positive Attitudes Toward School in a Middle School Dropout Prevention Program Using Interdisciplinary Units

ED328811

by

Verna P. Norris

Cluster 29

A Practicum II Report presented to the
Ed.D. Program in
Early and Middle Childhood
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

NOVA UNIVERSITY

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

Verifier: Wilbert Caldwell

Wilbert Caldwell

Principal of Quincy Educational Center

Quincy, Florida

December 6, 1990

This practicum report was submitted by Verna Parker Norris under the direction of the advisor listed below. It was submitted to the Ed. D. Program in Early and Middle Childhood and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

Approved

Georgianna Lowen, Ph. D., Advisor

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ABSTRACT

Developing Positive Attitudes Toward School in a Middle School Dropout Prevention Program using Interdisciplinary Units. Norris, Verna P., 1990: Practicum Report, Nova University Ed.D Program in Early and Middle Childhood. Descriptors: Academic Failure/Adolescents/ Careers/ Career Choice/ Career Education/ Career Planning/ Cooperative Planning/ Critical Thinking/ Decision Making/ Decision Making Skills/ Dropouts/Dropout Attitudes/ Dropout Characteristic/ Dropout Prevention/ Dropout Programs/ Dropout Research/ Educational Attitudes/ Education/ Attitudinal Change/ Educational Counseling/ Education/ Educational Change/ Educational Cooperation/ Educational Development/ Educational Experience/ Educational Innovation/ Educational Methods/ Educational Needs/ Educational Opportunities/ Educational Work Relationship/ Educationally Disadvantaged/ Experimental Learning/ Group Activities/ Interdisciplinary Approach/ Intermediate Grades/ Learning/ Middle School/ Potential Dropouts/ Preadolescents/ Problem Solving/ School Attitudes/ School Holding Power/ Student Attitudes/ Student Attrition/ Student Behavior/ Student Centered Curriculum/ Student characteristics/ Teaching Methods/ Teacher Participation/ Teamwork/ Teacher Influences

The practicum was designed to develop positive attitudes in at-risk middle school students. One aim was to give students an opportunity to discover the relationship of education to their future success. Another aim was to develop decision making and critical thinking skills in these students. The last aim was to expose students to numerous career opportunities.

The writer developed four interdisciplinary units centered around the importance of education, decision making skills, critical thinking skills and career awareness; met with teachers; helped develop a calendar; obtained material; arranged initial and culminating experiences for each unit;evaluated each unit; led a teacher workshop; supervised and maintained the project.

The results of the practicum were positive. An analysis of the results showed that students have more positive attitudes when there are hands-on opportunities, they see the relevance of the subject matter, they see a functional use of information learned at school, they are allowed to work together to complete a task, they see the correlation of subject areas as they impact on one theme, and they are given practice time to develop critical and decision making skills. Students were allowed to work in small groups in order to have collaborative learning experiences. Teachers understood the requirements of other teachers and spaced their assignments. Following a calendar demanded preplanning, but it also gave focus for the entire time of the unit. Teachers enjoyed working together as a team and began in addition to plan small units on their own.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Work Setting and Community

This practicum took place in a small town school which was once a K-12 school, then a middle school and now a dropout center and profound/moderately profound center. The town as well as the county was predominantly black and made up of a low socioeconomic population. Most people found employment in a neighboring city as there were no industries or major businesses in town. There were tomatoes and mushroom farms out from town where many parents worked. Eighty-five percent of the students came from one parent homes and many had relatives who had dropped out of school. Most of the students were bused to and from school and were on free or reduced lunches. The school population was comprised of one hundred profoundly and moderately retarded children from Pre-k to twelfth grade and eighty-five at risk potential dropout children from seventh grade to twelfth grade which included five pregnant teenagers.

The plant, built around 1900, consisted of six buildings one of which was condemned. Dropout prevention students used two of the buildings exclusively and shared three with the exceptional education children. In general the non-air-conditioned plant was old and in drastic need of repair and refurbishing. Among other problems was that the public address system only worked on all-call which constantly disturbed classes.

There was an open door policy for admittance at the end of each six weeks. Students from all the other public middle and high schools in the district were sent to this school if they were in danger of dropping out of school, if they

continually caused disruptions at the regular school, if it was felt that a different approach to learning is needed, or if they became pregnant.

Although there were 7th-12th grade students in the dropout prevention program and K-12th grade students in the exceptional education classes, this practicum dealt with only the 7th, 8th and 9th grade dropout prevention students. There were five pregnant girls in the program, seven seventh graders, fifteen eighth graders and thirty ninth graders enrolled in the dropout prevention model during the period of time that the first and second units were initiated. As the third and fourth units were initiated during the fall of the following year, the students in each grade varied from the previous year, as well as a new seventh grade population was added. There were twelve seventh graders, fifteen eighth graders and twenty-one ninth graders attending during the fall. The make up of the student body changed almost daily. Thus, the impact of each unit had to be evaluated on its own with the students in attendance when the evaluation tool was administered. In addition to the students, there were eight teachers, three administrators, one counselor, and a district area coordinator.

Students in each grade were together as they went through the day. Teachers taught more than one subject per period because of the small number of teachers and students. Teachers did not have to be certified in the areas in which they were teaching.

The school curriculum offered the basic courses of English, reading, science, social studies and mathematics, physical education, computers and music.

The Writer's Work Setting and Role

The writer's role was that of administrator in charge of curriculum development and implementation. Among other duties, the writer created the master schedule, assigned students to their classes, ordered and distributed materials to the teacher, and coordinated the volunteer program at school. In addition, the writer was in charge of staff development. This entailed arranging for in-service for all the faculty and staff, and keeping abreast of the current status of the certification of all the faculty so as to be able to assist in meeting certification requirements through staff development. In addition, the writer checked lesson plans, modeled teaching techniques, led workshops, and observed teachers for evaluation and needs assessment. The writer assumed the leadership of the Center when the Principal and Assistant Principal were absent or off campus.

The writer also served on county committees such as Reading Improvement Committee, Teacher Education Committee, Volunteer Coordinator Council, and the Secondary Curriculum Assistants.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

There was a negative attitude among middle school students in the dropout prevention program. The at-risk students in grades 7-12 who were involved in the alternative education center's program had a record of being unsuccessful in school. Even though students had to agree to attend for one semester, they often found it difficult to become enthusiastic about attending school regularly and achieving academically. The negative attitudes that the at-risk students had developed throughout their school experience followed them to the center. This was evidenced by poor attendance, the number of failures and retentions, and the lack of cooperation, respect, and personal responsibility on the part of students once students had been admitted to the program. Accompanying a lack of motivation to succeed academically was a continuation of unacceptable social skills which often led to suspensions from the center. At-risk students perceived school as unrelated to their future lives, and thus did not appreciate the value of attending school regularly, getting along with authority figures and other students, and academically succeeding.

If the situation improved, at-risk students would exhibit a positive attitude towards school. This would be evidenced by students coming to school regularly and succeeding academically. Secondly, responsible, positive, and cooperative behavior would be exhibited by the at-risk students. Next, development of decision making and

goal setting skills would be learned. Finally, at-risk students would develop an awareness of career opportunities .

The problem was that students in a dropout prevention program possessed negative attitudes toward school.

Problem Documentation

Attendance bulletins from August 1989 to September 1989 showed a large number of student absences. Total absences for a two month period of time for the three grades were three hundred sixty-six absences for forty-two students.

Table 1

Daily Attendance Roster

Total number absent from 7th, 8th, and 9th grades
8/22/89-9/20/89

	7th grade	8th grade	9th grade
Total Enrollment	7	15	30
Number of Absences	54	126	186

Students' interest in academic success was reflected in the number of F's that the students made during the first six weeks.

Table 2

Number Of Failures On Report Cards

First Six Weeks

	7th grade	8th grade	9th grade
Total Enrolled	7	15	30
Number of Failures/ No. Possible	18/49	50/105	40/120

More than one third of the seventh graders, almost half of the eighth graders and a third of the ninth graders made F's the first six weeks. Usually children try hardest the first six weeks and get better grades. This was not the case as the large number of D's made by the 7th, 8th and 9th grade at-risk students was twice the number of F's made by the same students. These students were not off to a good start, and unless changes were made, they probably would fail the subjects they were taking.

Students displayed a lack of respect for the school and others. Graffiti lined newly painted walls and litter cluttered the school daily. There was a lack of respect and cooperation of the faculty and staff by many students as shown by the number of referrals made to the Assistant Principal.

Table 3

Number of Referrals for 7TH, 8TH and 9TH Grades

	7th grade	8th grade	9th grade
Number Enrolled	7	15	30
Number of Referrals in One Week	3	7	15

Students did not see school as helping them with their future jobs or careers. They had not investigated possible careers and were limited in their information about alternatives to the ones with which they were acquainted. The answers given on the Career Interest Survey indicated a lack of knowledge by students (See Appendix A).

Table 4

Results of Career Awareness Survey

Has decided upon career.		
Total number	yes	no
40	8	32
Believed school will help students prepare for career		
Total number	yes	no
40	12	38
Desires more information about certain careers.		
Total number	yes	no
40	40	0

Causative Analysis

When students have poor attitudes about school, there are many possible causes that vary with each child. Negative attitudes concerning school develop over a period of time. The experiences that at-risk students have had in previous educational situations as well as influences from other people help them to develop less than positive attitudes towards school. One reason for a poor attitude may be a lack of success in the past. Another reason may be that students see no connection between learning and their future success. They do not see school as preparing them for a career or giving them skills to use in the job market. Seeing no functional use for school, at-risk students find another way to spend their time.

The family and friends of many at-risk students do not value education, and this influences the student's attitude. When peers and significant others in a student's life indicate a disregard or contempt for school and education, they have a great influence on the student's value system. At-risk students do not have enough positive memories of success in school to counteract the negative influence of other people. Many alternative education students possess poor self-concepts and decision making skills. The number of referrals and suspensions are evidence that at-risk students make poor decisions. At-risk students are not surprised to fail or get in trouble. In fact they expect to have problems, be told of their failures and anti-social behavior. To pass or be complimented may cause embarrassment. among at-risk students' friends. Alternative education students do not know how to handle success; they have experienced so little of it. By continuing their past behaviors the at-risk student programs himself for continued failure.

Another reason that at-risk students have negative attitudes toward school

may be that they have failed to develop internal incentives to motivate themselves to attend school regularly and achieve academically.

In addition, at-risk students see teachers and other adults in the school setting as their adversaries rather than their partners in the learning process. Because of previous experiences at school, at-risk students particularly do not trust adults because they believe adults play games and are not sincere about helping them succeed.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

The current literature on dropouts reported that there are one million students dropping out of school each year (Butler, 1989). Butler believed that at-risk students can be kept in school if schools are improved and student needs are met. He further stated that students from poor families need early intervention programs such as Head Start. He also suggested smaller class sizes, more parental involvement, better health care, and more extra curricular activities for at-risk students.

Rumberger (1987) stated that socioeconomic status causes some students to develop negative attitudes which leads to students dropping out of school. Minorities and males are the most frequent dropouts because of negative attitudes. The make-up and value system in their homes contribute to their negative attitudes. Many of the students come from single parent homes and/or from homes in which the parents have low educational and occupational attainment levels. Education is not valued nor is it encouraged in many of single parent, low socioeconomic homes. Students instead are urged to drop out and

work at minimum paying jobs to help the family. In addition there are few positive learning opportunities or learning materials in low socioeconomic homes.

Low socioeconomic, pregnant, school age girls are at-a higher risk of dropping out of school than are low socioeconomic girls that are not pregnant (Berger & Shechter, 1989). Berger and Shechter stated that when students have more than one at-risk indicator, students are more likely to drop out of school than other students. Students with two or more risk indicators are in desperate need of alternatives to neutralize at least one of the at-risk factors. Children from poor families need to be exposed to developmental stimuli that leads to an appreciation of education and school.

In order to eliminate the lack of educational stimulus in low socioeconomic homes, educators must keep the public aware of the situation while working to correct it (Hamby, 1989). Educators need to involve the community in helping young people see the need for an education by ensuring the possibility that educational incentives and materials are in the homes of at-risk children. Together the school and the community need to develop ways to deal with at-risk children even in elementary school.

Schools can foster a better climate for at-risk students by having small classes, flexible scheduling, community-like atmosphere, and a committed staff (Cuban, 1989). Cuban continued by saying that direct instruction and the whole language approach to learning works with at-risk students. Cuban suggested that teaching for mastery rather than just exposure, is an effective strategy to use with at-risk children. Team teaching, teachers teaching more than one subject, and following students through their school career are ways to build a family-like caring system which would make children feel like they belong and thus have a more positive attitude toward school.

Firestone (1989) stated that there are five ways to ensure students staying in school. First, students must feel safe while attending school. Educators must ensure the

safety of both students and faculty if learning is to take place. Secondly, students need to see order in the school which will give them a sense of security. Next, educators should have high expectations for all students which will raise the self-esteem of at-risk students. Next, at-risk students need to view teachers as partners who have mutual respect for each other. Finally, at-risk students need learning to be relevant to their lives. Career-oriented learning for example was seen as relevant by at-risk students.

In order to change student attitudes about school, educators need to know what has caused these attitudes so as to counteract or eliminate them. At-risk students have some characteristics in common. Berger and Shechter (1989) described these students as young people in the state of transition who do not possess clarity of their own environment. According to Berger and Shechter, at-risk students do not understand their own limitations nor what society thinks are normal expectations for students.

In addition, at-risk students have low educational and occupational aspirations (Ekstrom, et al, 1986). Race, low socioeconomic status, and low academic achievement lead to negative attitudes toward school. Ekstrom (1986) stated that at-risk students differ from other students in their sophomore year. Differences that may indicate an at-risk student include the lack of parental contact with the school, the lack of educational material in the home, the lack of encouragement to learn outside the school and the lack of parental academic expectations. In addition, many at-risk students' mothers work, are uneducated and are single parents. At-risk students have more disciplinary problems, participate in less extra curricular activities, feel alienated from school, and associate with other students who feel the way they do about school. At-risk students feel less popular, less successful, and less satisfied

with school. Poor grades, limited educational expectations and a dislike for school lead at-risk students to drop out. Lack of direction leads to a negative attitude towards the usefulness and value of education and school.

Seeing no connection between school and their future, at-risk students have numerous problems adapting to school. Many have a high absentee rate (Pallas, 1987). They felt that school has nothing to offer them, and so they stay at home. Selective truancy insures the student of not progressing through the educational system. As a result, students fail courses and are retained. Not all the causes for poor attitudes come from the students and their environments, however. The educational system has contributed to the negative attitudes students have concerning school by raising standards that poor students find even harder to meet (Pallas, 1985). He suggests that educators give meaningful school experiences in which students can succeed.

Floyd Hammack (1986) found more males than females are overaged in their current grade, and thus more males drop out of school. More black students than Hispanic and white students seem to be overaged in their respective grades according to Hammack's study. Hammack believes that in order to reduce the dropout rate, retention policies need to be revised to eliminate the problem of being overaged in a grade.

Beck & Muai (1982) observed that being retained makes students overaged in the class which contributes to negative attitudes toward school and to dropping out of school. Beck & Muia stated that at-risk students are caught in the middle of a self-defeating cycle. At-risk students are not interested in school, which leads to low grades, which leads to frustration, which leads to missing classes and truancy or disruption and suspensions, which in turn leads to negativism and eventually quitting school. Because of high teacher expectations and poor grades, low socio- economic students develop

feelings of insecurity which leads to poor self-esteem and self-worth. In an attempt to save their self-esteem and self-worth, lower socioeconomic students do not want to conform to the policies of the school which leads them to be disrespectful and uncooperative with the faculty and staff.

Many of students are low achievers because of the poor attendance and social-psychological problems that stem from their family background (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Wehlage & Rutter found in their study of at-risk students that non-college bound graduates and dropouts see the school and staff as uninterested, ineffective and unfair in discipline. Dropouts studied were found to have been suspended more often and to have missed classes more often than graduates. The dropouts studied had at one time believed they would finish high school and get further training, but because of intervening situations and pressures, they dropped out instead of finishing.

Lack of interest and apathy on the part of students are main concerns of principals and teachers alike. When students develop a negative attitude toward school, many times they drop out (Huber, 1984). Huber stated that at-risk students are interested in many things, but school is not one of them. He believed that educators need to kindle the interest of apathetic students by making school more relevant to their needs and interests.

Natriello & Dornbush (1984) stated that the emphasis on high standards lead to higher demands of students in the classroom, which low achieving students find hard to meet. Even though high standards are commendable, educators must guard against creating classrooms in which low achieving students develop even more negative attitudes toward learning which may lead to their dropping out of school. C.K.Tanner (1989) stated that at-risk students

were discouraged by the extended day which meant that students took more courses and had more expected of them. The additional time, courses and attitudes toward school especially among black students. It was felt that black students saw the extended day as a prolonged period of time in which they felt inadequate and unsuccessful.

The influence that students' families have on them may also produce negative feelings about school. Rumberger (1987) stated that socioeconomic status causes some students to develop negative attitudes which may then lead to dropping out of school. Many of these students come from single parent homes or form homes in which the parents have low educational and occupational attainment levels. The value system in such homes contributes to negative attitudes about. education. Since it is not valued nor is it encouraged in many of these homes, students are urged to dropout and work at minimum paying jobs to help out the family. In addition, there are few positive learning opportunities in low socioeconomic homes. Many homes do not have learning materials nor are children encourage the use of them in other places such as the library.

The literature review concerning students with negative attitudes toward school led through several disciplines. Information was gathered from regular and special education. Other material was found in psychology, motivation, and philosophy.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The goal of this practicum was for at risk students in a dropout prevention school to have more positive attitudes toward school in seventh through ninth grade.

Behavioral Objectives

In order to develop positive attitudes towards school the following four objectives were projected for this practicum. The first objective was that students would discover why education was important to them. The second objective was that students would develop decision making skills. The third objective was that students would become aware of a variety of careers and the necessary prerequisites to enter those careers. The fourth objective was that students would develop critical thinking skills in order to evaluate material wisely.

Measurement of Objectives

An attitudinal survey was to be given to determine to what extent students felt education or school was important to them. If thirty out of fifty-two students answered eight out of the ten questions correctly, the objective would have been accomplished (see Appendix B).

If thirty out of fifty-two students answered eight out of ten questions correctly on prepared worksheets utilizing decision making skills, then the second objective would have been accomplished (see Appendix C). It was felt that after the implementation of the unit, students should be able to apply the learned skills to

many situations.

If eighteen out of twenty-six students in the 7th and 8th grades listed two careers in which they have become interested and the prerequisites to enter those career fields on a student career evaluation sheet, objective three would have been accomplished (see Appendix D).

If thirty out of forty-eight students answered eight out of ten questions correctly on prepared worksheets utilizing critical thinking skills, then objective four would have been accomplished (see Appendix E).

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGIES

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

Many educators have made suggestions as to ways to reduce students' negative attitudes towards education and school. If negative attitudes are to be changed, today's students must feel that education is pertinent to their everyday lives. They need to see the relevance of learning to their present and future needs. The lack of interest and apathy on the part of students towards the importance of school are main concerns of principals and teachers. When students develop negative attitudes toward school, many times they dropout (Huber, 1984). Negative attitudes result in attendance, behavioral and disciplinary problems (Ekstrom et al., 1986). It is the responsibility of educators to offset negative attitudes by creating positive attitudes in these students. The four interdisciplinary units were implemented in order to change students' attitudes towards school.

In order to develop interest in education, students' individual educational needs should be met. If the student is weak in basic skills, he should be remediated so as to be able to function in the business world (Orr, 1987). In light of higher academic standards, additional help should also be available to students who need it (Natriello & Dornbush, 1984, Pallas, 1985). Higher demands of state standards today will lose many low ability students if extra help is not available (Natriello and Dornbush, 1984). This problem was being met through the regular program and was not an objective of this practicum.

Another way to make learning relevant is to show students the connection between school and being a success in business. Clark (1987) suggested that

school officials collaborate with businesses in the community to reward students for staying in school and doing well. Businesses in the community donated items as incentives to all high school students for being on the honor roll each six weeks. In addition, on-the-job training itself should be included in the curriculum (Hamilton, 1986). There were few companies established in the community that could give on the job training. Anyone needing on the job training would have to be transported to a larger town twenty miles away in another county, and this was not possible at this time.

The curriculum needs to be flexible in order to meet the needs of at-risk students (Bar & Knowles, 1986). Blocked periods were used usually once a week at the dropout prevention school. Alternate programs and settings should be used to give students a variety of experiences and alternatives (Grossnickle, 1986). A large number of at-risk students have only a limited exposure to the possibilities of employment opportunities. Students were exposed to people from different careers during the career awareness unit.

Another way to counteract negative attitudes about school is with friendly, supportive teachers and staff. When students sense that teachers and administrators are interested in their success, they seem to expect more of themselves and thus achieve more. Educators should show interest in the individual child and tailor instruction to meet his needs (Greene & Unoff, 1989). Genuine concern for the child's success in school will produce more positive attitude towards education in general. Although the faculty at the dropout prevention school knows every student and tries to encourage each one, the caring and encouragement of students is an on-going need. Having to work together to develop the interdisciplinary units, helped to develop a cooperative, nurturing

atmosphere among the teachers.

Making personal and career counseling available to students would be another way to develop positive attitudes. In addition Butler (1989) suggested, courses in personal development and self-esteem to help children's self image and sense of value. The opportunity to attend discussion groups in which self-esteem and personal development are covered would allow students in an non-threatening way an opportunity to develop in social skills. This year weekly small group counseling to a preselected population was begun in the dropout prevention center. Individual counseling should be available for personal problems as well as career information (Clark, 1987). The CHOICES computerized program was available for one student at a time, but In order to meet the needs of all the students for counseling services, other school personnel would have to assist the counselor.

Students need to see the relevance of school to their every day needs. One way to develop an appreciation for school among at-risk students is through problem solving (Larson, 1989) and critical reading skills. Students should be taught a process by which to evaluate and make decisions, and then be given ample time to practice making decisions that will affect their lives. This was an objective of this practicum.

Another way to interest students in learning is to encourage cooperative learning. Schools that adopt a cooperative learning approach have found that students were more motivated when they worked and learned together because they did not feel as threatened by their mistakes (Slavin & Maddin, 1989). In addition, more learning took place when material was integrated with other academic areas rather than isolated (Jacobs, 1989). Interdisciplinary teaching has been tried on a limited basis in the dropout prevention center, but it will be used

exclusively in the practicum. Jacobs (1989) stated that the interdisciplinary approach to learning needed to be used in teaching students today. Because of the vast amount of knowledge of which students need to be aware, the fragmentation of the school day, the lack of relevance between material learned and daily life and society's demand, educators must teach students to interrelate their learning. This strategy was used in many of the activities during the practicum.

Students who are at-risk of dropping out of school and have negative attitudes towards school, do not understand what their own limitations are nor what society thinks are normal expectations for them. At-risk students are confused about future careers, goals, and expectations. These low educational and occupational aspirations (Ekstrom et al., 1986) lead to a negative attitude toward the usefulness and worth of an education. To counteract this, students should be exposed to numerous examples of successful people who are willing to share how they prepared for and eventually arrived at their present place in life. The motivational speakers as well as the career resource people used during the practicum served as models of success for the students.

Other educators believe that at-risk students should be taught precise information for mastery (Hamby, 1989) and then be evaluated regularly (Slavin and Madden, 1989). If the material to be learned is relevant to students' needs, students would be more likely to master the material. If evaluations were done on a short-term basis and on specific and relevant material, students would be more likely retain the material and succeed in mastering the tasks. Students who succeed regularly have a more positive attitude toward learning and school. Although some teachers used this technique, it had not been adopted school wide. Benjamin also (1989) stated that students must have "hands on"learning experiences.

Students must become active learners and help develop their own educational programs. Students would more likely buy into the educational process if they have helped make the decisions that affect them. This strategy was used through out the practicum where material had to be learned in order to apply it to given situations.

Other ways to create a positive attitude among students towards school involved county leadership. The county should seek to hire the best teachers to teach at-risk students (Tanner, 1989). Excellent teachers who are enthusiastic, expect success from their students, and know many techniques for reaching the apathetic learner should be those chosen to teach at-risk children. As the county has the option to assign teachers to schools, and it has done so at the Alternative Education School, the principal has to work with those assigned.

School systems should also review existing retention and promotion policies so as to encourage apathetic students to learn and stay in school (Tanner, 1989). Hammack (1986) stated that over aged students were more likely to have poor attitudes toward school and eventually dropout. Many over aged students are low academic achievers (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986), or they have been held back in an earlier grade because of failing subjects which influences their attitudes toward school (Beck & Muia, 1982). County policies on retentions and promotions at present remain the same as they have been in the past. Negative attitudes have also come from the suggestion that the school day be extended. This is especially true of black students (Tanner, 1989). Tanner stated that if the school day was to be extended, students should see how the policy would personally benefit them. At present an extended day has been implemented in the county . Student are aware that they can graduate early if they have the necessary credits, and thus they do not

outwardly show resentment to the extended day. Most students who attend regularly in grades seven and eight and who do not pass are administratively promoted. Students in grades nine through twelve must earn certain credits to pass. In hopes of giving students two chances to succeed rather than fail right away, the principal instructed all the faculty not to fail anyone the first six weeks of the year. Another suggestion by Larson (1989) was to replace home suspensions with in-school suspensions so as to maximize opportunities for students to learn. Although this was not done at the dropout prevention center during the implementation of the practicum, it is a possibility in the future.

Other possibilities include suggestions by Grossnickle (1986) that attendance policies need to be enforced in order to keep students in school. In some cases, however, strict attendance policies have caused students to drop out especially if they are working or have small children. The principal was in the process of establishing an in-school suspension, but the attendance policies were established by the county and remained intact.

Description of Selected Solution

Several of the ideas previously mentioned were incorporated into four inter-disciplinary units. It was believed that students need to first realize the importance of education and how their education affected their future. This became the basis of unit one which was "Education, the Key to My Future". Emphasis was placed on attending school regularly, on the school being a preparation place for a good job, on a good education as a survival technique, and on the importance of being all one can be. Parental conferences were held and pertinent information was sent home

that advised parents on how to become part of their child's learning team. Several subject areas were involved such as language arts, reading, social studies and math.

As many students found it difficult to rationally think through a problem so that they act responsibly, it was decided to make "Decision Making Skills" the second unit in the practicum . Emphasis was placed on short and long range goal setting. Practice was given in making decisions by a set of criteria. Students were led to develop a sense of ownership for global decisions. They were given practice in making value judgments. Language arts, reading, and social studies were involved in this unit.

The first two units were used as a basis for the third unit which was on "Career Awareness". Students discovered career fields in which they were interested through interest inventories. Many students talked with people in the fields they had chosen. Guest speakers, and media presentations were used to expose students to various career opportunities.

Many people succumb to propaganda and advertising techniques, thus it was decided that the fourth unit would be "Critical Thinking". It involved using propaganda and advertising techniques to critique and evaluate material. Since this unit was initiated during the fall and it was an election year, many examples came from political advertisements. Newspapers, magazines, television advertisements were used to give students hands-on experiences with the material.

Report of Action Taken

The Alternative Education teachers attended a fall workshop on

Interdisciplinary units before the actual practicum began. This proved to be invaluable as they were already acquainted with the procedure for developing and implementing a unit. Given the four areas with which the practicum was to deal, the teachers selected "Education, the Key to My Future" to be the first unit. The English, reading, social studies and math teachers were involved in this unit. A calendar was established to visually show when each discipline would become apart of the unit and when each would exit. The calendar also established the initial experience and the culminating experience (see Appendix F). After these plans were confirmed, posters were made by the students and flyers were placed around the school announcing the theme and motto. The daily announcements included positive thoughts as well as the motto and theme of the unit.

The unit began with a motivational speaker who had dropped out of school and had come back to finish and go on to college. Since this was a local person, most of the students knew her and the obstacles she had to overcome. The reading teacher had the students read The Pearl by John Steinbeck. The emphasis was placed on the impact education had on the characters.

Mid-way through the reading of the book, the English teacher assigned an essay to be written on "Why Education is Important to Me". These essays were to be evaluated and awards given in an assembly at the end of the unit.

The social studies teacher used the 1990 Almanac to have students do comparisons of different countries. Students compared several countries including Mexico, which was where the story supposedly took place, and the U.S.A. as to per capita income, life expectancy, compulsory education and literacy rate. After discussing the information, students had to write an opinion paper as to how these categories influenced each other. Students also located La Paz, the location of the

story, on the map.

In mathematics, students charted the information found in social studies. Bar lines, and circle graphs were used to display various information found in the Almanac.

The culminating experience was an assembly in which students who had written the winning essays read their essays and were awarded prizes. The evaluation instrument was administered and the results tabulated .

The second unit developed was one on decision making. The title "The Choice Is Yours" was selected. Reading, English, and social studies classes as well as the librarian and an adult volunteer participated in the unit. This was the last unit taught before summer vacation. Part of the emphasis was on making wise decisions over the summer. The Occupational Specialist began the unit with a presentation on different colleges and trade schools. He began by passing out expensive automobile brochures, pictures of mansions and boats. He asked the students which ones they would like to have and then preceded to tell them what they would have to do to get those expensive items. The main point was the decision was up to them. If they desired nice things, they needed to decide to make it happen by making the right choices as far as their education.

The social studies teacher gave the students a list of decision making criteria (see Appendix G). They practiced using the list on decisions that were made in history that led to war. They were asked to list alternative solutions to the problems and then to identify possible consequences to those solutions. Situations that had occurred during the year were discussed and checked by the process sheet. Students then indicated the choices they had made for the summer.

The reading teacher assigned the students the novel The Outsiders by Hinton

to be read. As students read the novel, they discussed the decisions the characters were making. These decisions were compared to the decisions making sheet to see if they were rational decisions.

The English teacher had students keep a daily log of decisions they made during the unit. They had to analyze their own decision according to the decision sheet.

An adult volunteer met with small groups of students to discuss choices they were making and how those choices might affect their lives. These were related to what had happened the past year, what might happen during the summer, and what could happen the following school term. She led them to see that their decisions would predict the outcome. Thus, ownership of their actions was established.

The culminating experience was the movie "The Outsiders" shown by the librarian. After the showing, students were asked to compare the movie to the book.

The evaluation instrument was administered and the results were tabulated.

Because the first two units were so successful, the District Coordinator scheduled a one week work shop during the summer for the Alternative Education teachers. During that time several interdisciplinary units were identified, discussed, and organized. Although there were changes in the faculty at the beginning of the next school term, the plans were still initiated.

A career awareness unit was next. Each teacher was asked to discuss possible careers within his/her subject area with his/her classes. As a result of the summer workshop a Career Education class was set up for seventh and eighth graders for the first semester. The first six weeks was an over view of the course and served as the unit for the practicum.

The beginning experience was an interest inventory that accompanied the

CHOICES computer career search program. After completing the inventory, one student at a time used the information from the inventory to generate a list of possible careers in which he/she might be interested. The CHOICES program is a bartering program which makes students prioritize their desires such as salary, education experience, working conditions, etc. In addition, students heard several speakers from various career fields such as law enforcement, health field, real estate, and the armed services. A monthly magazine on careers was ordered and discussed.

As a culminating experience, a role playing activity was used to give students on hands experience with the judicial and law enforcement system. Students volunteered to enact certain roles. They researched the job description for their role and acted as that person during the activity. The scenario was that two people were seen leaving the gym with something under a coat. Later, the coach reported a stereo missing from the gym. Investigators were sent to investigate and gather evidence, witnesses were summoned, charges were filed, and two people were prosecuted for the crime. Students not active in the court room scene became the jury.

The evaluation sheet was administered to those in attendance, and the results were summarized.

The last unit developed was one on " Be a Critical Thinker". Since it was an election year and the unit was done during October and November, political candidates' advertisements played a large part in this unit. In addition, the election of Miss QEC was to be held in October. Posters and speeches made by the school candidates were also studied for persuasive techniques (see Appendix H). The reading, English, social studies, television production and art classes participated in

this unit. The beginning of the unit involved having girls sign up for the Miss QEC pageant and watching political advertisements on television.

The reading teacher assigned Animal Farm by Orwell. The class discussed satire and tried their hand at writing a satire of their own.

The social studies teacher discussed the different types of propaganda or persuasive writing. Students did several activities using this information. They made posters from magazines and newspapers showing the techniques. They copied verbatim ads that used certain techniques.

The English teacher had the students write advertisements of their own using the techniques. Miss QEC candidates wrote their speeches in this class.

The art teacher instructed students in how to make affective posters which were displayed around the school.

The culminating experience was an actual election using the voting booth for Miss QEC. Later, the crowning took place based on the votes cast. The evaluation instrument was administered and the results tabulated.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

The four interdisciplinary units were to help students develop positive attitudes towards school. Each of the four interdisciplinary units accomplished the purpose for which they were intended.

The first objective was for students to discover why education was important to them. At the end of this unit, an attitudinal survey with ten questions was given to the students who participated in the unit. Students marked strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree to each situation. The desired answers were either agree or strongly agree. If thirty out of fifty-two gave the preferred answer on eight out of ten questions, then the objective would have been met. Out of twenty males and twenty-five females, twenty males and twenty-three female students answered the attitudinal survey with the appropriate answers (see Table 5). According to these results, objective one was accomplished.

Table 5

Results of the Attitudinal Survey

	Male	Female	Total
Total no. taking survey	20	25	45
No. giving preferred answer on 8 out of 10 questions	20	23	43

All the 7th grade males strongly agreed that it was important to attend school regularly, that learning was important to them and that it was important to graduate from high school. There were only five answers in the unacceptable range. Three out of the five dealt with the correlation between school and the individual's career (see Table 6). There were no answers that strongly disagreed with the statements. Over all, the seventh grade boys expressed positive attitudes concerning school.

Table 6

Results of the Attitudinal Survey

7TH Grade Boys

T=6

Possible Answers	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Question No.				
1.	4	1	1	
2.	1	3	1	
3.	4	1	1	
4.	5	1		
5.	4	2		
6.	6			
7.	5	1		
8.	2	3	1	
9.	2	3	1	
10.	6			

The 7th grade girls chose the acceptable answers for all the questions except for three. Two girls thought their teachers did not want them to succeed (see Table 7)). Over all, the seventh grade girls succeeded in possessing positive attitudes towards school.

Table 7

Results of the Attitudinal Survey

7 th Grade Girls

		N=4		
Possible Answers	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Question No.				
1.	2	2		
2.	1	3	1	
3.	3	1		
4.	2	2		
5.	2	2		
6.	2	2		
7.	2	2		
8.		4		
9.	1	1	1	1
10.	3	1		

There were only two unacceptable answers given by eighth grade males. One was to the question regarding the importance of attending class on time and the other was to taking school seriously (see Table 8). The eighth grade boys seem to feel pretty positive about school at this point.

Table 8

Results of the Attitudinal Survey

8 th Grade Boys

N=5

Possible Answers	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Question No.				
1.	4	1		
2.	4	1		
3.	3	1		
4.	3	2		
5.	2	2	1	
6.	4	1		
7.	4	1		
8.	1	3	1	
9.	3	2		
10.	4	1		

There was only one unacceptable answer among the eighth grade girls. It dealt with the question concerning the quality of a person's educational experience and its affect on one's success in a job. All eight females strongly agreed with what they were learning in school would help them in their careers, and that it was important for students to graduate (see Table 9). These girls also seem to have a positive attitude about school.

Table 9

Results of the Attitudinal Survey

8 th Grade Girls

N=9

Possible Answers	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Question No.				
1.	5	4		
2.	6	2	1	
3.	9			
4.	5	4		
5.	2	7		
6.	7	2		
7.	4	9		
8.	5	4		
9.	5	4		
10.	9			

More than half the ninth grade males answered unfavorably concerning whether the quality of one's educational experience influenced one's future career success. Three out of nine boys said they did not take school seriously (see Table 10). There were more negative answers from these boys than from the others. Many of these boys had failed a couple of times before and had several other problems that made them at-risk.. Many had been suspended and some were court placements. The younger seventh and eighth grade students seemed to have a more positive attitude toward school

Table 10

Results of the Attitudinal Survey

9 th Grade Boys

N=9

Possible Answers	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Question No.				
1.	1	7		
2.	2	2	5	
3.	4	3	1	
4.	5	4		
5.	2	7		
6.	3	4	2	
7.	4	4	1	1
8.	1	5	3	
9.	4	4		
10.	4	4	2	1

Twenty-one out of one hundred twenty possible answers given by the ninth grade girls were unacceptable. One girl strongly disagreed on all ten questions making up for ten out of the twenty-one (see Table 11). She had moved from school to school, had been in trouble with the law enforcement authorities, and had emotional problems. It seemed that the older students still held more negative attitudes concerning school than their younger .counterparts. Perhaps they had had more negative experiences because they had been in school longer, were more opinionated, were more open and honest or were more hostile towards authority seen in a school.

Table 11

Results of the Attitudinal Survey

9 th Grade Girls

		N=12		
Possible Answers	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Question No.				
1.	9	1	1	1
2.	7	3		2
3.	5	4	2	1
4.	5	6		1
5.	6	3	2	1
6.	5	5	1	
7.	5	5	1	1
8.	5	4	2	1
9.	3	7		2
10.	8	2	1	

Objective two was evaluated by students responding to a work sheet concerning decision making (see Table 12). If thirty out of fifty-two students chose the desired answers, then the objective would have been accomplished. It should be noted that the situations mentioned on the work sheet were common events among the alternative education students.

The older students had either been involved in a similar situation or knew first hand of someone who had been in such a dilemma. The last five questions dealt with the parts of the decision making process; all students were able to give examples of each step of the process from their own personal experiences. As the total correct answers for each question was at least thirty or above, the objective was achieved (see Table 12).

Table 12

Results of the Decision Making Worksheet

	Male	Female	Total
Total no. doing worksheet	21	24	45
No. giving preferred answer on 8 out of 10 questions	20	23	43

Objective two stated that if thirty out of fifty-two students answered with the preferred answer, then the objective would have been accomplished. Since forty-three students correctly answered the work sheet on eight out of ten questions, the objective was accomplished. Decision making skills should not be taught in isolation, but should be used through out the day, when situations arise that need responsible decisions. It should be noted that students were allowed to collaborate on the work sheets. As a result, there was a greater interest in the assignment.

Objective three stated that if eighteen out of twenty-six successfully accomplished the exercise, the objective would have been satisfied. Out of the twenty-four responding, all of the students could identify two careers in which he/she was interested and twenty could give specific requirements for the job (see Table 13). Therefore, this objective was met. Students have begun to see that career opportunities are all around them. They have been introduced to job shadowing and monitoring as a possible prerequisite to working in the career they choose.

Table 13

Results of Career Awareness Exercise

Total no. responding	Total no. listing two careers	Total no. giving requirements of careers
24	24	20

The last objective was that thirty out of forty-eight students could correctly identify propaganda and advertising techniques, the objective would be accomplished. Since thirty-five out of forty-six correctly completed the task the objective was met (see Table 14). In order to be responsible citizens, students need to be able to think and read critically. This unit allowed students to become familiar with several types of propaganda techniques. They were given a variety of practice situations. It is hoped that students will be better able to critically evaluate for themselves in the future. It should be noted that the students were allowed to work in pairs for this assignment.

Table 14

Results of the Critical Thinking Worksheet

Total no. attempting task	Total no. completing task	Total no. correctly answering
46	35	35

Conclusion

The four interdisciplinary units' objectives were met. Students were exposed to units on the importance of education, decision making skills, career awareness, and critical thinking skills. Although these ideas and skills are an on going lesson, they were highlighted and emphasized with in the special units. The students seemed to enjoy each unit and looked

forward to the next one. Working together with several teachers and in small groups for collaborative learning activities was one reason given by students for liking the unit approach. Students also looked forward to the initial activity and the culminating activity in each unit and offered suggestions for future activities. This specific beginning and closure seemed to be important to them. They also expressed approval of the unity of the learning experiences. They seemed to appreciate the fact that several subject areas were working together rather than teaching facts in isolation. Jacobs (1989) emphasized the need for interdisciplinary approaches to educating students so as not to fragment learning. During these units, communication between teachers increased as they shared ideas and actually helped each other accomplish their common goal.

Other strong points included the use of collaborative and cooperative learning techniques among the students. Students who seldom participated in the class were willing to work with others in a group effort . Slavin and Madden (1989) have stated that collaborative learning takes pressure off of students who feel inadequate. After the units were completed, students asked to continue working together in small groups on other assignments.

The hands-on experiences that students had seemed to help them buy ownership into the class and its assignments. Benjamin (1989) stated that hands-on experiences made students become active learners and helped them buy into their own education programs. Using CHOICES which was based on students' own interest gave them the power to manipulate their possible careers. The decision making skills they had practiced earlier were used to decide where compromises would be made. Larson (1989) stated that through problem solving and critical reading skills students become better decision makers. Students were given many opportunities to do systematic problem solving through out the units. Hopefully this will carry over into their daily lives.

The manner in which the students embraced each of the units reaffirms the fact that

students are interested in learning by doing. The units not only gave purpose to the students, but the teachers worked together as a team rather than each doing their own thing. The teachers seemed more confident about their purpose and objectives as they moved through the units. The material covered in each subject area coincided with the Florida student performance standards. This made it easy for teachers to join in to the units and at the same time accomplish their state wide goals.

Students continually need to be made aware of how their education will affect their future. Educators need to make course work functional so as to fulfill students' needs. Students need to practice decision making and critical thinking skills daily. These continued efforts will encourage students to develop to their fullest potential and to make wise career choices based on their abilities and interests. Positive attitudes need to be cultivated just as decision making and critical thinking skills need to be practiced daily so as to be come a way of life.

Recommendations

Since the four interdisciplinary units were so successful the following recommendations are made to anyone who would want to duplicate the practicum.

1. Teachers involved in the units would have to meet together regularly.
2. Teachers would need to agree on a topic or theme.
3. Teachers need to brainstorm areas they wish to cover and decide how each subject will fit into the whole.
4. Teachers need to decide on the initial and culminating experience.
5. Teachers need to devise a calendar showing when the unit starts, ends as well as when each subject area will inter and leave the unit..

6. Teachers need to assign jobs such as arranging speakers, gathering materials,etc.
7. Teachers will need to meet throughout the unit to readjust and evaluate the unit.

Dissemination

The four units that were deveioped for the practicum will be shared with other schools within the district. The practice of working together to develop units will continue to be emphasized at the Alternative Education Center through in-service programs. Other interdisciplinary units will be developed as the Comprehensive Plan for the school calls for at least two per semester. It is hoped that the success encountered will encourage teachers to develop units even on a small basis with two or three teachers.

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APPENDIX A

CAREER INTEREST SURVEY

Appendix A

CAREER INTEREST SURVEY

Answer the following questions concerning careers.

1. Have you decided what your career will be? yes no

If yes, what is it?_____

2. Do you believe the school will help prepare you for your career? yes no

Why or why not?_____

3. What would you like for the school to teach that would help you prepare for a career?

_____

4. Would you like to know more about possible career choices? yes no

List careers about which you would like to learn.

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX B

ATTITUDINAL SURVEY

Appendix B

Attitudinal Survey

Circle the number that indicates how you feel about the following statements.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Disagree
4. Strongly disagree

1. The amount of education a person has determines his success in life.
   1 2 3 4
2. The quality of a person's educational experience affects his job success.
   1 2 3 4
3. What I am learning in school will help me in my career.
   1 2 3 4
4. It is important to be in school regularly.
   1 2 3 4
5. It is important to be in class on time.
   1 2 3 4
6. Learning is important to me.
   1 2 3 4
7. It is important to try my best and attempt every assignment in class.
   1 2 3 4
8. I take school seriously.
   1 2 3 4
9. My teachers want me to succeed.
   1 2 3 4
10. It is important for me to graduate from high school.
    1 2 3 4

APPENDIX C

DECISION MAKING SKILLS

Appendix C

Decision Making Skills

Choose the action that best describe what you would do in the following situations.

1. Ignore the situation.
2. Go for help.
3. Watch but don't get involved.
4. Talk to someone secretly afterward about it.
5. Tell someone in authority immediately

1. You see a man selling crack to a young boy you know.

   1 2 3 4 5

2. You know your sister is skipping school.

   1 2 3 4 5

3. You see someone cheating on a test .

   1 2 3 4 5

4. You see some boys you know breaking into a house.

   1 2 3 4 5

5. You see someone pull the fire alarm on purpose.

   1 2 3 4 5

Give an example when the five steps to decision making were missing in a situation that involved you or someone you knew.

1. Listening intently
2. Getting all sides of the story/ gathering information
3. Thinking of possible solutions or alternatives
4. Listing the consequences of each action or alternative
5. Acting on the decision and evaluating the results.

APPENDIX D

CAREER AWARENESS EVALUATION

Appendix D

Career Awareness Evaluation

Fill in the following chart with two careers that you possibly might consider as a career choice.

1. CAREER EDUCATION REQUIRED BEGINNING SALARY

WORKING CONDITIONS ADVANTAGES DISADVANTAGES

2. CAREER EDUCATION REQUIRED BEGINNING SALARY

WORKING CONDITIONS ADVANTAGES DISADVANTAGES

APPENDIX E

CRITICAL THINKING EXERCISE

Appendix E

CRITICAL THINKING EXERCISE

Give an example of any ten of the following techniques. You may use the newspaper , magazines, or TV ads.

1. band wagon
2. nationalism
3. prejudice, stereotyping, bias
4. put downs/guilt trips
5. testimonials
6. scapegoating
7. transfer
8. plain folks
9. glittering generalities
10. name calling
11. card stacking

APPENDIX F

INTERDISCIPLINARY CALENDAR

Appendix F

APRIL, 1990

INTERDISCIPLINARY CALENDAR

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
2 Motivational speaker READING Reads The Pearl	3	4 SOC. STUD. Uses Almanac	5 ENGLISH Writes essays	6
9 READING con. ENGLISH CON. MATH Makes graphs	10	11 Essays turned in	12 Essays read & ranked	13 AWARDS ASSEMBLY

APPENDIX G

DECISION MAKING STEPS

Appendix G

DECISION MAKING STEPS

1. STATE THE PROBLEM
2. GATHER INFORMATION
3. LIST ALTERNATIVES
4. IDENTIFY CONSEQUENCES TO GO WITH THE ALTERNATIVES
5. CHOOSE THE BEST ONE FOR YOU IN YOUR SITUATION
6. ACT ON YOUR CHOICE
7. EVALUATE THE RESULTS

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